THE UNITED NATIONS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

We, the peoples of the United Nations...

The preamble of the United Nations Charter affirms the aims and purposes which "we, the peoples of the United Nations" are committed to realize through the world Organization. Through non-governmeatal organizations (NGOs) the people of the world play an important constructive role in furtnering the Charter—working for peace and security, the economic and social advancement of all peoples and the promotion of human rights. From the founding days in San Francisco, NGOs have made valuable contributions by drawing attention to issues, suggesting ideas and programmes, disseminating information and mobilizing public opinion in support of the United Nations.

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What Is An NGO?

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are non-profit citizen's voluntary organizations organized nationally or internationally. NGOs are diverse in structure, membership and financial support. Some are active in information and education; others are operational and are engaged in technical projects, relief, refugee and development programmes.

Examples of NGOs are: professional, business and cooperative organizations; foundations; trade unions; religious, peace, and disarmament groups; youth and women's organizations; development, environmental, and human rights groups; research institutes and associations of parliamentarians.

The Relationship of NGOs With the United Nations

Since 1945, NGOs have had a special relationship with the United Nations—one that has become increasingly complex and diversified. Today, almost every department of the United Nations and its specialized agencies has liaison offices or services for NGOs. Each year resolutions and legislative mandates of United Nations bodies call for consultative, operational, programme and informational relationships with NGOs.

More than 1500 national and international organizations have official relationships with the United Nations—formally related to the United Nations either through Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) or Association with the Department of Public Information (DPI). Many others cooperate and work with United Nations' agencies, substantive departments and offices as well as through United Nations Information Centres around the world.

An Interdepartmental Working Group on Relations between Non-Governmental Organizations and the United Nations meets regularly under the chairmanship of the Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs and Secretariat Services whose office is responsible for coordinating Secretariat relations and policy with NGOs. Its members represent departments and offices of the Secretariat and United Nations programmes which have relationships with NGOs. It reviews and makes recommendations to the Secretary-General, monitors compliance and deals on an *ad hoc* basis with policies and procedures governing the NGO relationship.

Non-Governmental Organizations...

- Provide a channel through which information concerning the United Nations reaches the public.
- Play a crucial role in mobilizing public opinion and building understanding for the United Nations, its related agencies and programmes.
- Monitor and promote policies of their own countries in support of United Nations goals and resolutions.

The United Nations...

- Facilitates and ensures consistency in the participation of NGOs in the deliberations and decision-making process of United Nations' legislative bodies.
- Utilizes the expertise, services and capacities available among NGOs in the implementation of approved projects and policies.
- Provides information on the objectives and purposes of the United Nations for dissemination by NGOs.

At the United Nations, NGOs are provided...

- access to open meetings of United Nations bodies;
- invitations to briefings, seminars and consultations, conferences on political, economic, social and humanitarian issues;
- an NGO Resource Centre with documents, publications, press releases, and regular mailings of information materials;
- use of the Dag Hammarskjold Library;
- assistance in designing and organizing educational and information programmes and advice on linking United Nations issues with local, national and organizational concerns;
- help in identifying and obtaining background information, audio-visual materials, speakers for workshops, seminars and conferences.

Some NGO Activities

As an integral part of a global action network, NGOs have helped in:

- focusing world attention and taking initiatives on United Nations programmes and issues—peace and security, economic and social development, decolonization and disarmament, human rights, health, crime and drugs;
- convening world conferences and parallel NGO events on the environment, youth, women, the aging, population, shelter and food;
- launching international years for peace, the child and disabled persons;
- promoting freedom from hunger, world literacy, anti-*apartheid* and disarmament campaigns;
- working with United Nations bodies on technical assistance and development programmes and on relief and rehabilitative efforts.

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The NGO/DPI Executive Committee is an elected body representing NGOs Associated with the Department of Public Information. The Committee acts in an advisory and liaison capacity to channel information and to represent the interests of NGOs in Association with DPI. The Committee cooperates with DPI on events, programmes and initiatives of mutual interest. It assists in planning DPI/NGO conferences and orientation of NGO representatives; it was responsible for the NGO exhibit at United Nations Headquarters.

CONGO, the Conference on Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council, serves as a representative voice of NGOs before the United Nations. Its aims are: to ensure that NGOs in consultative status enjoy the fullest opportunities and appropriate facilities for performing their consultative functions; to provide a forum on the consultative process; and to convene meetings of member organizations for the exchange of views on matters of common interest.

"If the hopes and aspirations which the peoples of the United Nations enshrined in the Charter are to be fulfilled, multilateralism, as embodied in the United Nations, needs its champions; they must speak more boldly and knowledgeably...I wish, in this connection, to refer specifically to the many non-governmental organizations which share the goals, and in many instances, the work of the United Nations. I am convinced that, in the coming years, the United Nations will need to place even greater emphasis on close communication and cooperation with these organizations. They constitute an essential extension of the capacity of the United Nations to reach its global constituency."

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar
Secretary-General of the United Nations

Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council

Article 71 of the Charter provides that "the Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultations with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence." Such arrangements are governed by ECOSOC Resolution 1296 which makes provision for NGOs to be placed in consultative status with the Council as well as for them to hold consultations with the Secretariat. The decision to place NGOs in consultative status is made by the Council upon recommendation of its Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations. That Committee is composed of nineteen Member States and meets every two years. For further information contact:

Non-Governmental Organizations Unit
Department of International Economic and Social Affairs
Room DC2-1760
United Nations
New York, N.Y. 10017

Association with the Department of Public Information

The principal purpose of the NGO relationship with DPI is the re-dissemination of information to increase public understanding of the work and achievements of the United Nations and its bodies. Association with DPI is given legislative authority by ECOSOC Resolution 1297 which calls on DPI to associate NGOs, bearing in mind "the letter and spirit of ECOSOC resolution 1296." NGOs apply to the NGO and Institutional Relations Section of DPI for association. A senior Secretariat committee makes decisions according to established criteria. NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC may, upon request, be automatically associated with DPI. For further information contact:

NGO and Institutional Relations Section
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Room S-101
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